Washington State Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

CEP-68R Annual Report 2000

A: Content

This report contains the necessary requirements of CEP-68R. It will outline a summary, illustrate financial contribution, discuss monitoring and evaluation and provide success stories along with recommendations that the State of Washington believes should be addressed.

B: Executive Summary

The total number of signed contracts (CRP-1) for the State of Washington now numbers 57 with a total of 1180.9 acres.

The primary reason for the dramatic increase in the numbers from the 1999 report where the state only had 6 signed contracts is due to the improvements that were made to the program in July 2000. While these improvements were significant, additional recommendations will be addressed later in this document.

The only practice allowed under the Washington CREP is CP22.

Location County	# of Contracts	Total Acres	Average CCC Rental Payment/Acre	Average CCC Cost-Share Payment/Acre
Clark	1	7.5	$89	$633
Columbia	12	349.2	$120	$596
Garfield	13	313.1	$91	$1,465
Grays Harbor	2	6.7	$196	$1,107
King	1	1.8	$155	$1,347
Lewis	3	145.5	$200	$550
Okanogan	1	18.2	$72	$801
Skagit	6	39.2	$258	$1,255
Snohomish	1	7.0	$192	$1,204
Wahkiakum	3	69.0	$206	$821
Walla Walla	6	68.7	$120	$321
Whatcom	8	160.7	$341	$1,671
Total	**57**	**1180.9**		

While the numbers illustrated in the table represent the number of contracts (CRP-1) that are signed and approved by FSA, it does not include the increased number of project offers signed under the CRP-2 and being designed and reviewed. Also, FSA offices are accounting for offers and contracts. The State does not formally report landowner interest and calls to local offices.

C: Financial Contribution – Technical Assistance and Cost Share Dollars

Washington State has a total of 48 Conservation Districts, 31 of which are Districts that have CREP eligible streams. The financial accounting below is comprised of funds utilized by the 31 eligible districts and are non-federal program expenditures.

Please note that Washington State's fiscal year is July 1 – June 30. Expenditures are detailed by the fiscal year associated with state budget planning.

FISCAL YEAR 99-00

Technical Assistance **July 1, 1999 – June 30, 2000**

- Funds used for technical assistance, public outreach, and training and equipment relevant to program work: **$586,000**
- Public Outreach program, contract to marketing firm, brochures, videos, posters, print advertisement, radio advertisements, and landowner survey: **$15,000**
- Conservation Commission for staff, support, and equipment for CREP: **$130,000**
- Contracts for GIS and database services - map development, digitization, database development, and equipment: **$36,000**

Total expended for FY 2000 – Technical Assistance **$767,000**

State Money distributed for Cost Share - FY 2000. **$23,000**

Total for fiscal year 99-00 **$790,000**

FISCAL YEAR 00-01

Technical Assistance **July 1, 00 – June 30, 2001**

- Funds to be used for technical assistance, public outreach, training and equipment relevant to program work. **$827,830**
- Public Outreach program and marketing activities. **$14,000**
- Conservation Commission for staff, support, and equipment for CREP **$120,000**
- Contracts for GIS and database services - map development, digitization, database development, and equipment **$36,000**
- Unexpected expenditures to be used for technical assistance **$2,170**

Total budgeted for FY 2001 – Technical Assistance **$1,000,000**

State funds budgeted for Cost Share - FY 2001

- CREP Conservation Districts: Funds for cost-share to landowners **$3,080,116**
- Contingency to be used for cost-share for landowners **$1,139,604**
- Contract for plants for CREP **$122,875**
- Commission Administration **$75,000**

Total budgeted for FY 2001 – Cost Share **$4,417,595**

Total CREP funds budgeted for FY 2001 **$5,417,595**

These funds are a part of the State Strategy to Recover Salmon. The State has committed more than $80 million per biennium to the salmon recovery effort.

It is worth noting that as the remainder of this report is presented, it repeats many of the same concerns about this program as contained in the 1999 CEP-68R Report.

D: Monitoring and Evaluation

In reality, there will be a very limited capability to provide meaningful monitoring results, based strictly on CREP Riparian Buffers, in the early years of the program. The primary long-term benefits the buffers will provide for salmonids is shade and the corresponding reduction in water temperature, which is a limiting factor for salmonid reproduction in most of the waterways targeted by the program. Sporadic enrollment, and the time needed for woody species growth, will not lead to early water temperature reductions. Two benefits that can be realized, however are the nutrient uptake ability of the buffer plantings and the opportunity to substantially reduce sediment runoff by utilizing the buffer practice (CP22). Despite these two contributions to water quality, ***Washington's CREP has always been envisioned as providing a long-term benefit that will take several years to be fully realized.***

Development of an annual monitoring will be done in this year, in conjunction with several other initiatives to inventory and monitor salmonids including establishing the known and presumed limiting factors on their survival. One of these projects is the "Limiting Factors Analysis" or LFA, which the Conservation Commission is currently completing with 7 full-time fisheries biologists. This analysis is identifying the limiting factors on salmonid survival and reproduction in the major salmonid bearing watersheds of the State. The LFA Project is covering all but a small portion of the State of Washington and the analysis is already identifying loss of streamside habitat as a major limiting factor in most watersheds.

The Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon outlines additional monitoring goals. Since CREP is an integral piece of this strategy, these goals for monitoring will be utilized as the framework. Those goals include development of a coordinated monitoring framework to integrate a statewide, regional, watershed and project specific monitoring system within 4 years. Specifically, develop criteria, protocols and guidelines regarding the definition and use of adaptive management and criteria for information management and reporting.

It bears noting however, that the Limiting Factors Analysis is providing substantially more eligible stream miles that can and should be included as part of the program given their importance to salmonid lifecycles. In some areas of the state there is tremendous interest in participating in this program, yet approval for inclusion is limited due the 10,000 mile constraints contained within the program.

The agreement between the State and USDA asks for comparison of salmon habitat characteristics and population trends in streams where there is significant enrollment in the program with similar streams where program participation is not significant. Currently, monitoring efforts are centered around the survival of the newly planted trees and shrubs. In a particular area in the state, 21 CREP projects have determined that 142,662 seedlings are required to comply with the CP22 practice. The emphasis in situations like these will revolve around the assurance that these seedlings survive. Even when enrollment and habitat plantings have been completed and established, quantitative monitoring will be difficult, if not impossible to measure, for many years.

While there is certainly tremendous support for the partnership and support of FSA in this program, the Washington CREP is different than many other CREP programs across the Country. In Washington citizens and landowners are attempting to deal with an endangered species that has effected all but a small area of the state. The CREP program is utilized as not only a riparian area development program, but also as agriculture's contribution to assist in the recovery lost habitat for an endangered species. Many of the issues raised within in this report coincide with discussions and evaluation of the CREP program by fellow partners and landowners.

E: Success Stories

1. **Biological Assessment**
   Completion of the BA for CREP was finally completed in November 2000, well over a year after it was submitted. Landowners and contracting agencies now have a better idea of what is expected of them under this program.

2. **Program changes**
   Completion of the program changes that had been requested in late 1999. The added incentive payments and changes to the program by the State of Washington were approved in July of this year. Since those changes we have experienced a dramatic increase in the number of contracts and the amount of interest in this program.

3. **CREP meeting in North Carolina**
   The meeting held in North Carolina provided valuable information about other CREP programs nation-wide and also an opportunity to discuss what is and isn't working directly with USDA personnel. Since that meeting, several teleconferences have kept the communication and dialogue among states and USDA alive.

E: Program Recommendations

Listed in order of importance.

1. More State control

Landowners want and deserve reasonable timely answers to questions. Having to wait for months while minor program changes are considered is not practical or acceptable. The decision needs to be made in the State at the State FSA Committee level or in the local county committee meetings. Commodities are varied and Watersheds are unique entities that vary greatly in geography, climate, vegetation, land-use, and need site specific solutions made at the lowest level possible in the most effective time frame. For this program to be successful, timely local level decisions need to be available.

2. Perennial and Horticulture Crops Exclusion

There continues to be no resolution to changing this federal rule. Discussion of this topic by USDA during the CREP meeting in North Carolina was short and to the point, indicating that it was not going to be discussed. There are many landowners that are unable to participate and are dumbfounded as to why (see Appendices 1 & 2). We continue to request attention to this important rule change. USDAs recognition of topography, state agricultural commodities and their locations to important stream segments could result in an expedited solution to this issue for landowners in Washington State. Until that happens, the program continues to be criticized for this questionable exclusion.

3. Soil rental rate changes vs. value of the habitat

As mentioned several times already, Washington's CREP is different AND our topography and commodities are different. The use of soil rental rates has caused feedback from several directions. In areas that little or no CRP has been used, predominately Western Washington, there was little or no need for County Committees to keep soil rental rates current. While CREP is a great fit in these areas, the federal rules limit the amount of change in the rates and the limited contracts in these areas are reflective of low soil rates. The State, in-essence, gets penalized for being an efficient manager by not requiring County Committees to do needless work. Much criticism has been received from landowners and local officials about both the current rates and the policy steps necessary to change them.

There is also the basic question of how does the soil rental rate relate to the value of the habitat that is desired. This is a great question and one not easily answered except for these are the program rules. Little flexibility has been given to the State Committee to recognize the higher value of habitat value versus soil rental.

4. Cost-share – tree protectors

The exclusion of conifers in tree-protectors is not acceptable and does not make sense for our program. This is clearly a decision that needs to be made at a state FSA level. To pass such an exclusion once the program was underway has not been helpful and raises serious questions regarding federal commitment from both the landowner and state perspective. These tree protectors are an absolute essential element for the seedlings to survive.

5. Lack of Understanding of CRP Contracts

Again, this statement epitomizes the diversity in Washington's agriculture commodities. Many agriculture producers in this state are not familiar with FSA Conservation Reserve Programs. The assumptions that the agriculture community outside of the cropping area would understand and trust this program approach was shortsided. An inordinate amount of time has been spent educating dairy, beef and hay producers, for example, about FSA programs and contracts. This process has contributed to a slow start to the program and continues to plague the process.

6. Buffer negotiations / ESA

As mentioned earlier, Washington's CREP is unique in that an ESA listing of salmonids is the primary driver for program implementation. The objectives of providing a CP22 standard that complies with both the CWA and ESA requires that the NRCS practice be reviewed within the State for acceptance. Landowners have been somewhat reluctant to participate in CREP until clearer knowledge is gained on any changes that may occur to CP22 as a result of this in-state review. The current maximum allowable width is 180 feet; landowners who participate are subject to that maximum width.

Final Comments

This is a tremendous program for landowners across the country. But more attention and flexibility must be provided to the State and County FSA Committees to allow it to excel. Clearly Washington State can show the dramatic change in the program pre-July 2000 to-date after the improvements were implemented. Washington believes that if further attention is given to the comments raised in this report and attention paid to concerns raised by those responsible for implementation, the program would experience dramatic success in Washington State.